

Fusion: The Inis Meain Knitting Company and Ulster University Collaboration Project

Alison Gault, Lecturer in Fashion and Knit Design



Introduction

The outcome of a recent Intertradelreland Fusion project, which involved Inis Meain Knitting Company Aran Islands (the Industrial partner) the Ba (Hons) Textile Art, Design and Fashion Course (Fashion knit) Ulster University (the academic partner and knowledge provider) and a recent graduate (the knowledge carrier).

Objectives

The input of the graduate designer eager to extend their knowledge, skill base and understanding of the subject area, improving future employability opportunities.

The Industrial partner working with the University to avail of University resources and knowledge transfer opportunities creating new product developments and working practices.

The academic partner gains access to state of the art CAD CAM systems and knitting technology, networking events, designers, buyers, Industrial trade fairs and production teams.



Methods

Collaboration and Triangulation:

The Company Team met regularly on a weekly basis to discuss weekly tasks and to ensure project success.

The Steering group met on average once a month. Communication was also via email, telephone, video-conferencing or Skype between the partners this provided effective support throughout the project.

The Project Management Group met quarterly for PMG meetings. Reports were prepared and reviewed by all stakeholders quarterly while the graduate maintained a reflective journal. Therefore the methodology included the main stakeholders in the project, business consultants aligned to Intertradelreland and international agents.

Results

| Overall outcomes and Benefits to the Academic Partner |
|---|
| Lecture material for presentation and dissemination |
| Student Placements |
| Student Opportunities – Live Projects |
| Visiting Lecturer – Graduate and Company |
| Access to Resources – current and contemporary knitting operations |
| Contacts and networks |
| Journal papers and conferences |
| Overall constraints difficulties to the Academic Partner |
| Time invested in the project alongside academic responsibilities |
| Travel and the location of the Company |
| Overall outcomes and Benefits to the Industrial Partner |
| Training on the Apex system by the graduate disseminated to the company |
| Increase in sales |
| Investment in resources – physical and human |
| Design development input – New product ranges |
| Archive of Inis Meain styles, designs, patterns |
| Access to Ulster University students – placement/projects |
| Access to Ulster University equipment and resources |
| Increase in contacts and collaborations |
| Overall constraints/difficulties to the Industrial Partner |
| Training time investment in the graduate |
| 12 month project - short timeframe in a cyclical industry |

| Overall outcomes and Benefits to the Graduate Partner |
|---|
| Post Graduate Qualification |
| Communication and Presentation skills |
| Training on the Apex – CAD_CAM |
| Exploring interface between ADOBE and APEX |
| Organisational skills |
| Project management experience |
| Team Work |
| Sales and Marketing experience |
| Operation of production machinery |
| Research and Development |
| Overall difficulties/constraints for the graduate |
| Time in travel due to Company location to Training |

Conclusion

In conclusion the Fusion Project outlined the importance of developing partnerships between industry and university.

The academic partners’ access to cutting edge equipment and contemporary practice impacted on pedagogy that was disseminated via curriculum design and content.

The graduate benefit could be measured in terms of personal development, skills acquisition, post-graduate qualification and raised employability.

The Company had an injection of innovation that improved productivity, efficiency and market share. The increased turnover of 20% in the first 6 months continued to improve over the next 24 months with continued input from the academic partner and placement student employment.